

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGROTOURIST ACTIVITY IN ARIESENI AREA

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Abstract. *On Romania's territory we meet great a variety of cultural-historical values (folk art, ethnography, folklore, traditions, historical sites), a precious natural landscape, harmoniously combined with a rich landscape, all constituting in a valuable tourism potential and with certain special values for Romanian rural tourism. Currently, the Romanian rural tourism has a large development, this potential being in close connection with other forms of tourism: tourism circuit, spa tourism, religious tourism, hunting tourism, rest tourism and tourism of the weekend. Being known the fact that, currently, the decline of domestic tourist traffic is primarily due to the large share that population with low incomes holds and therefore unavailable for practicing a tourism activity, the policy of tourism development at the national level should focus on the development of some forms of tourism that address particularly to this category of population - rural tourism and agrotourism. This form of tourism, presents an important social dimension, both through practicing some lower prices and by its specificity, being a form of tourism of family, tourism for youth, tourism of leisure. Arieseni mountainous area is characterized through a rich natural and cultural heritage. Both traditional cultural values (folk art, folklore, ethnography, traditions) but also the nature of the area indicates a large possibility of capitalization of tourist potential through rural tourism, currently being already standing out a growing demand for this form of tourism, coming both from the country and from abroad.*

Key words: *rural tourism, tourism traffic, cultural values, tourist potential*

INTRODUCTION.

Arieseni is a hidden coomune in the heart of the Apuseni Mountains, at about 100 km from Alba Iulia, on the upper Valley of Aries, composed from 18 tiny villages scattered on the slopes of Bihor Mountains: Arieseni - center of commune, Avramesti, Bubesti, Casa de Piatra, Cobles, Dealu Bajului, Fata Cristesei, Fata Lapusului, Galbena, Hodobana, Izlaz, Pantesti, Patrahaitesti, Poinita, Ravicesti, Sturu, Stei Arieseni, Vanvucesti.

From agrotourism point of view, Aries Valley is the most developed area of Alba County, called the Tara Motilor.

Alba County has a **high tourism potential**, through its natural resources, cultural and architectural heritage, mountain and ski agrotourist resorts (Arieseni, Garda, Albac) and spas (Ocna Mures) famous, but also of not unexploited reserves due to inadequate technical facilities, of the insufficient tourist advertising or due to provision of poor quality services.

Apuseni Mountains, live at great heights represents an divers ethnographic area and a nature that provide opportunities for recreation-here lies one of the most important karsts regions from Romania - Scarisoara Glacier, Cave Ionele, Ordancusii keys, Aries gorge etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The main localities and tourist points from Arieseni, that can meet a diversity of tourism functions are: village Casa de Piatra, Vartop, Galbena, and Bubesti.

Alba County is one of the counties important of the Central Region, with high agrotourist potential, taken into account the county's tourist valences.

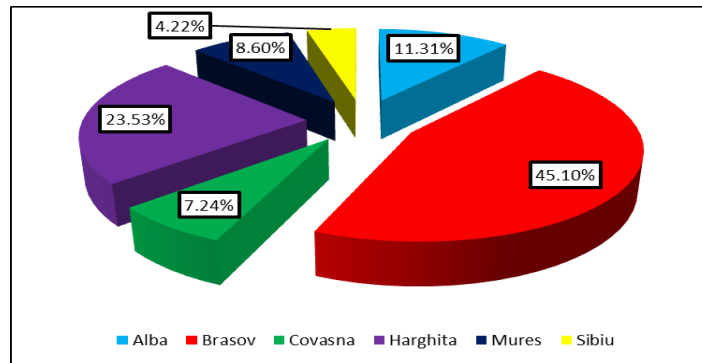


Figure 1. Distribution of agrotourist guesthouses by counties of Central Region, 2014

In the year 2014, at the level of Central Region there were registered a total number of 663 agrotourist guesthouses, 11.31% of them being found in Alba County's territory. With a total number of 75 agrotourist guesthouses, registered, Alba County is considered as the third County as agrotourist potential of the region.

Tourist enthusiasts by a quietly tourism, in the middle of rural traditions can spend unique moments in traditional rural landscape of the county, in an unpolluted environment where the richness and originality of the costume and folklore were kept unaltered.

From attractiveness' point of view of rural areas, opportunities to practice agrotourism in the County are in all tourist areas, unfortunately the infrastructure is not sufficiently developed to expand this type of tourism.

The distribution of agrotourist guesthouses, by localities of Alba County it is presented in *figure 2*.

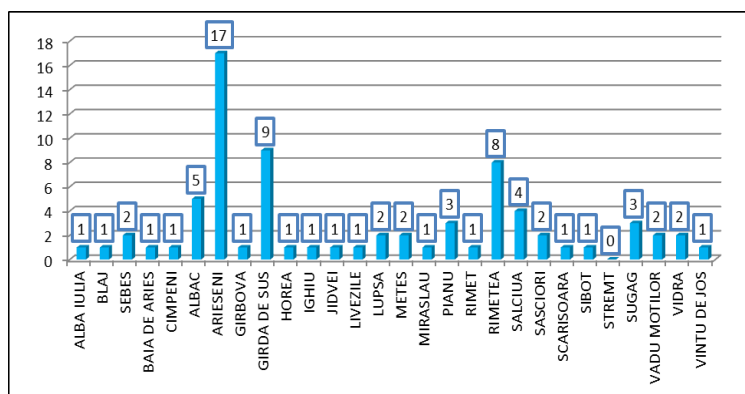


Figure 2. The distribution of agrotourist guesthouses, by localities of Alba County, 2014

More than half of the communes from Alba County have tourism potential, showing a significant degree of tourist attraction, making relevant the development of rural tourism. Only 3.46% from all rural localities have tourist guesthouses.

In the analyzed period it can be seen an increase of the number of agrotourist guesthouses, more than 9 times, from 8 agrotourist guesthouses registered in 2001 to 75, in the year 2014.

Those 75 agrotourist guesthouses registered in 2014, at the level of Alba County are distributed different in the component localities. Most of them are concentrated in Arieseni, 17 agrotourist guesthouses, followed by Garda de Sus with 9 agrotourist guesthouses, Rimetea with 8 agrotourist guesthouses and Albac with 5 agrotourist guesthouses.

Arieseni commune, recognized as the main agrotourist area of Alba County, concentrates 22.7% from the total number of agrotourist guesthouses of the County.

The practice of tourism in rural areas of Alba County is more intense, using a greater number of accommodation units, many of them being unregistered.

In Arieseni it is found, as well as the entire County's level, progressive increases of existing accommodation capacity, reaching in the year 2014, to a total number of 343 seats, concentrated in those 75 agrotourist guesthouses. Regarding accommodation capacity in operation, it was in the year 2014, around the value of 85.838 places-days, an increase of 25.6 times.

Tourism demand is represented by the number of tourists visiting the analyzed area. In terms of the number of tourists accommodated, in the 2000-2014 period, there may be an upward trend in the number of tourists accommodated, in agrotourist guesthouses, existent at the region level.

From the total of tourists accommodated in agrotourist guesthouses from the region, 88.8% are Romanian and 11.2% are foreigners.

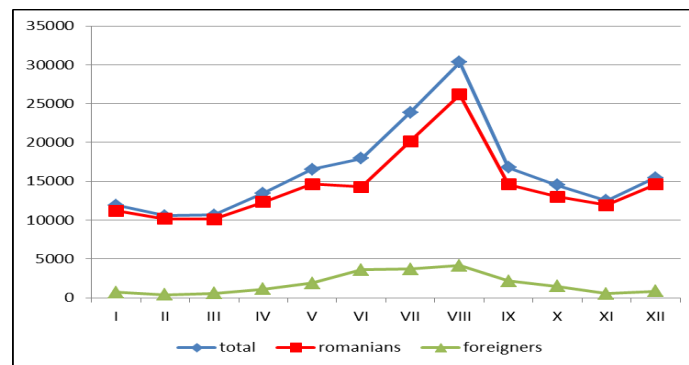


Figure 3. Evolution of tourist arrivals, in agrotourist guesthouses from Central Region

In the *figure 3* above was presented the evolution of tourist arrivals in agrotourist guesthouses constituted, at the level of Central Region, monthly, in the year 2014. It can be observed a concentration of tourist arrivals, in summer season, June, July, August and September, recorded a peak of season in August with a total number of 30.326 tourists. The analysis by type of tourists, respecting the total situation, with the concentration of tourists from June to September.

At the Alba County level the foreign tourists accommodated in these reception structures exceed the average of the region, representing 16.7%, *figure 4*.

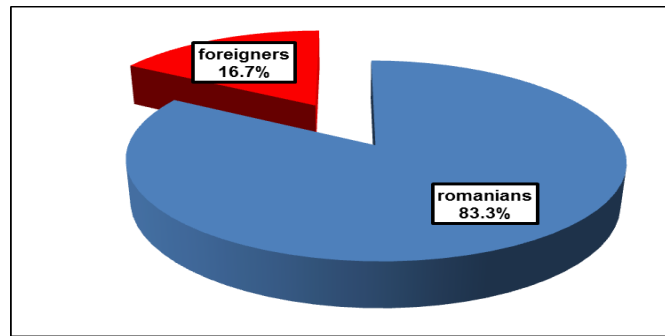


Figure 4. The structure of tourist arrivals, in agrotourist guesthouses, Alba County, 2014

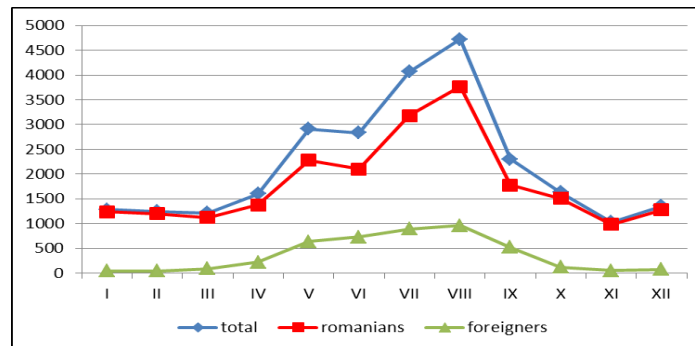


Figure 5. The evolution of tourist arrivals, in agrotourist guesthouses, from Alba County

At the level of Alba County there is a fluctuating evolution of tourist arrivals, compared to the one at regional level. Both, on the overall of tourist arrivals, but also in the case of Romanian tourists it can be seen an increased tourist activity in July-August. Significant arrivals of tourists are recorded in May, following the requests arising during off 1 May, but also during the cold season, given the existence of necessary conditions for winter sports in some areas of the County.

During the analyzed period, the number of tourist arrivals in agrotourist guesthouses, from Arieseni has increased, until 2012, reaching a maximum value of 6494 tourists. In 2013, there was a decrease, with 15.9%, in the next year being registered a growth with 4.3%.

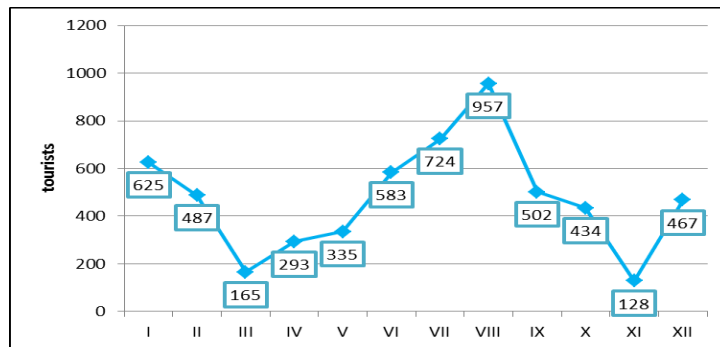


Figure 6. Monthly arrivals of tourists in agrotourist guesthouse from Arieseni commune, 2014

In the specific conditions of the tourism activity, besides the characteristics of dispersal in space of tourist flows, it is noted frequently also an unequal distribution in time of the demand for services, which in various tourist areas, leads to a pronounced concentration of tourists arrivals at certain times from a year and, respectively decrease of tourist arrivals in other periods. These seasonal variations, have serious economic and organizational implications in tourist activity.

The analysis of monthly arrivals of tourists in agrotourist guesthouses from Arieşeni commune indicates the existence of two seasonal periods: summer and winter. This thing is due to the variety of relief forms and to the existing tourist resources at the County level, which make possible the practice of some varied forms of tourism.

If at the County level, tourism activity during the cold season is restricted, in Arieseni, due to the presence of the Vartop ski slope, there is an intensification of tourist arrivals in the months December-February, the peak season being the month January, with a total number of 625 tourists. However, the largest tourist activity takes place here in the summer, from June to September, the peak season being reached in 2014, in August, when there were registered a total number of 957 tourists.

The evolution of overnight stays number is a fluctuating one, consisting of increases and decreases of the number of overnight stays during the analysed period. In the year 2014, the value of this indicator is 16.24 times higher than in the year 2000, at the Region's level. At the level of Alba County the increases are above the regional average, in the year 2014, the number of overnight stays being 20.18 times higher than in the year 2000.

Overnight stays registered in Alba County represented in the year 2014, 13.72% from the total number of overnight stays at regional level, being placed after Brasov County with 47.81%.

Analyzing the overnight stays, by types of tourists, at regional level during the period 2000 - 2014 it can be observed increases in overnight stays both in the case of domestic tourists (21.46 times) and foreigners (1.62 times).

In the period 2000-2014, the number of the overnight stays in agrotourist guesthouses own to Alba County has increased.

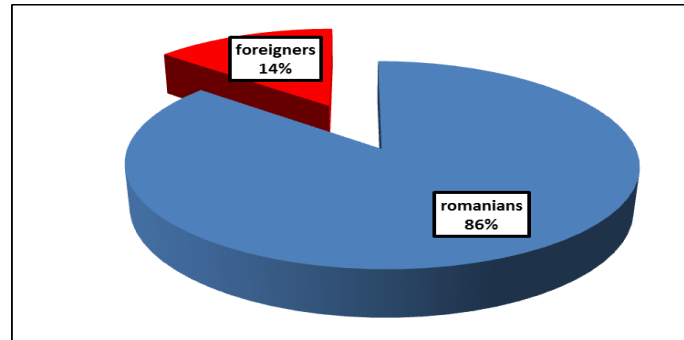


Figure 7. The structure of overnight stays, by categories of tourists, Alba County, 2014

In the year 2014, the number of overnights stays of foreign tourists, in Alba County stood around value of 8,343, representing 14% from total number of overnight stays of tourists registered at the County level, *figure 7*.

Overnight stays registered in existing agrotourist guesthouse at the Alba County level, indicate significant growth, for the period 2001-2014, from the 3369 days-tourist, in the year 2001, to 59,579 days-tourist in the year 2014, so an increase of 17.68 times.

At county level most overnight stays were recorded in Arieseni, given the fact that it constitutes as the main point practice of agrotourism, in Alba County. In the year 2014, overnight stays registered in Arieseni commune represent nearly a quarter from overnight stays realized at the County level (24.85%).

Monthly distribution of overnight stays in Arieseni commune, respects precisely tourist arrivals, being outlined, two periods of the season, both summer and winter.

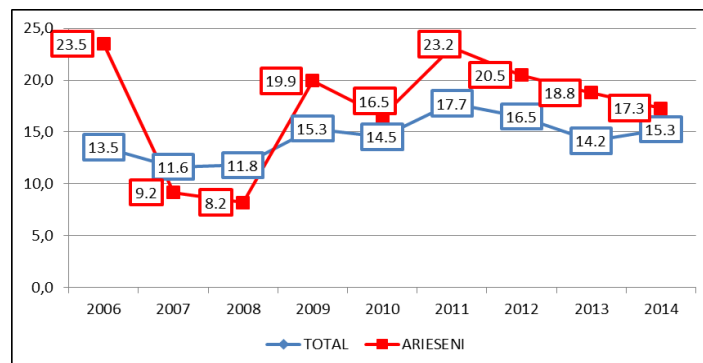


Figure 8. The evolution of the net use index of accommodation capacity in agrotourist guesthouses, Alba County, 2006-2014, %

In the analyzed period, the value of net use index of accommodation capacity in the case of agrotourist guesthouses experienced a fluctuating trend, marked by intensifications of respectively decreases of the net use index. In the year 2014, the value of net use index of accommodation capacity in the County was 15.3%, in increasing with 13.3%, compared to the

year 2006. Even if the value is superior to the year 2006, however, is not the highest value recorded during the reported period, the maximum was reached in the year 2011, 17.7%.

The analysis of the same indicator for Arieseni commune indicates in this case, an fluctuating evolution but, with profound changes. In the year 2006 it was registered the highest value of the net use index, 23.5%. In the next two years, the value of the net use index of accommodation capacity decreased with 65%. Significant increases were recorded in the year 2009 and 2011, when there was registered a value approximately equal to that from the year 2006 (23.2%), after which, in last years we can see again declines of this indicator.

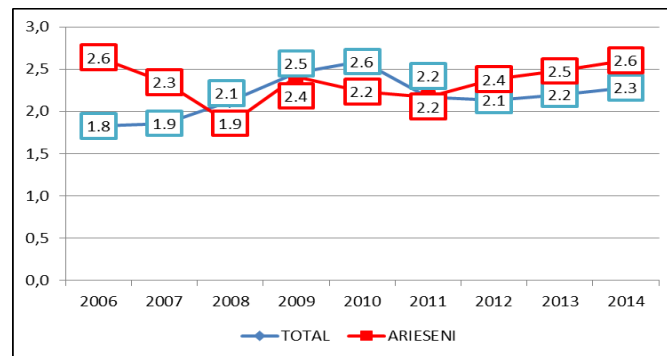


Figure 9. The average length of stay for tourists accommodated in agrotourist households, Alba County, 2006-2014

The analysis of the indicator average length of stay spent in agrotourist guesthouses, for Alba County is characterized through progressive increases, in the period 2006-2010, when the value of this indicator has increased with 44.4%, followed by a slight decrease in the period 2011-2012 (19.2%) and continuing with increases, in the last two years (9.5%). In the year 2014 the average length of stay at the Alba County's level was 2.3 days/tourist.

The average length of stay, in the case of Arieseni commune indicates a sharp decrease in the period 2006-2008, by 26.9% followed by a growth, in the year 2014 reaching the value of 2.6 days/tourist equal to that from the year 2006.

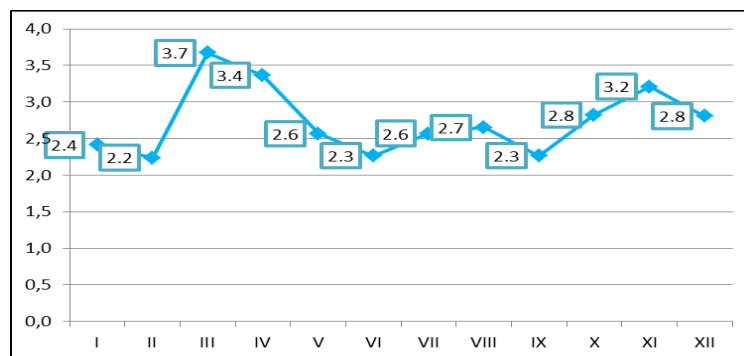


Figure 10. The average length of stay, in agrotourist guesthouses in Arieseni commune, in the year 2014

The analysis of the average length of stay, on the months of the year 2014 indicates a very different values, from a month to enouther. For the year 2014, the average length of stay registered the highest value in March, 3.7 days/tourists, being superior to the annual average, 2,6 days/tourist.

CONCLUSIONS

It is imperative necessary that agrotourism in Alba to quickly evaluate the chances of launching and become one of the key branches of the county's economy. Through this it would achieve a series of positive effects, namely: the creation of new jobs, geographically transfer in terms of resources, planning and land use, balancing the balance of payments, faster integration through tourism of Romania in European Union. It must also be taken into account the fact that agrotourism has a greater impact than other activity to the development of other economic branches. It is necessary to be realised a brief analysis to determine the main priorities for the development of rural tourism and agrotourism in our County, especially that it faces in last years with profound changes imposed by the transition proces to the market economy.

Arieseni commune, recognized as the main agrotourism area of Alba County, concentrates 22.7% from the total number of registered agrotourist guesthouse, of the County.

Natural tourism potential of the Arieseni area allows optimal practicing of agrotourism. This form of tourism in rural areas used as accomodation structure the agrotourist household with all daily occupations and facilities. In the same time is the most efficient way of exploiting local resources existing in rural areas.

For economic development of Alba County, it must done the rapidly assessment of agrotourism opportunities to be launched on the market so to become one of the key branches of the County's economy.

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